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ZC 14-22: Proposed Test and Map Amendment to Create New Zoning for the District's Portion of the Former Walter Reed Campus

March 5, 2015

Good Evening. My name is Blaise Rastello and I currently serve as the Director of Affordable Housing for Transitional Housing Corporation or (THC). THC is a leading non-profit developer of affordable housing in the District of Columbia and our headquarters are located in Ward 4 at 16th Street and Colorado NW. THC has been actively involved in the planning and disposition of the Walter Reed Campus and were selected as one of NOI users to locate 6,000 sf of our programmatic and office space within Building 14 of the site.

Tonight, I am here to strongly support the adoption of the new zoning code for the District's portion of the Walter Reed Campus. As a local nonprofit headquartered in Ward 4 and an NOI user, THC has been involved in the community planning process for Walter Reed since it began in 2005. The SAP, and the draft zoning that is based on it, reflect this collaborative planning process that included hundreds of local stakeholders – individuals, businesses, nonprofits, religious institutions, public agencies and elected officials. We commend the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) and the Office of Planning for involving the local community in the planning process in a meaningful way, and for prioritizing the inclusion of deeply affordable housing through the selection of nationally recognized NOI users – So Other Might Eat (SOME), HELP USA and THC – to provide affordable housing and comprehensive supportive services to the District's most vulnerable homeless populations.

As you are well aware there is a great need for affordable housing throughout the District and including in Ward 4. The Urban Institute's recent study on housing security in the Washington Region indicates almost half of all renter households in the region have struggled with high housing costs, including more than 150,000 households with severe housing cost burden.¹

Developed pursuant to the SAP, the current plan for Walter Reed Campus contemplated by the District and Master Developer *delivers 432 affordable units, 20% of the planned 2,099 units, nearly double the 10% affordable residential square footage required under the Inclusionary Zoning law. With 114 units by SOME and HELP USA, 30% of the overall 1,507 rental units planned for the site will be dedicated to very low income households earning 0-30% of Area Median Income (AMI), exceeding the very low income threshold set by the most stringent standards applied to District-owned land. Not only do these units target very low income households; they are targeted to homeless seniors and veterans, and will provide comprehensive supportive services, meeting the housing need of two of our city's most vulnerable populations. The remaining affordable rental and homeownership units are targeted to a mix of 50% and 80% AMI households, ensuring a mixed-income community at the new Walter Reed.*

We have been both welcomed and impressed by: (1) the District and the Master Developer's willingness to engage and collaborate with our organization and all of the affordable housing providers on the site;

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and (2) their recognition of the urgency for prioritizing affordable housing units as clearly demonstrated within their phasing plan which will deliver more than half of the affordable units as some of the earliest development to occur immediately after the property is transferred.

Finally, I can't express enough my respect and gratitude for the District's and Master Developer's desire to work with THC to co-develop senior affordable housing – in addition to the NOI users – at Building 14. As one of the leading non-profit developer's in the District, we are often approached by private for-profit developers to partner with them on co-developing a property to help them achieve their affordable housing goals and to assist in the economics of the transaction through our ability to obtain public financing resources. More often than not, these groups propose to have us participate on a very cursory level throughout the process. The Master Developer's approach has been more than inclusive. They value their partnership with THC and they have demonstrated their willingness to build the capacity of our organization and other local non-profit organizations through the re-development process in a significant and meaningful way.

On behalf of THC, we are excited to be a part of such a dynamic, energetic, smart and creative team. We whole heartily support the proposed zoning for the Walter Reed Campus and the Parks at Walter Reed master plan design. We encourage the quick enactment of the zoning, as both SOME and HELP USA have been awarded funding and are ready to begin development as soon as the land transfers. THC and the Master Developer are actively planning to start simultaneously or quickly thereafter. The timely passage of zoning will allow this landmark project to continue on schedule, creating new affordable housing for the District as soon as possible.

¹ http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/413161_Housing_Security-in_the_Washington-Region.pdf



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